

FEBRUARY HEALTH TIP

February is American Heart Month, which serves as the perfect opportunity to talk about how to prevent heart disease. In the United States, in Maryland and in Frederick County, heart disease is cited as the number one killer.^{1,2} Heart disease is no longer considered a condition which affects only the elderly- an increase in deaths is now being observed among groups as young as 15-34 years old.² Heart disease occurs when plaque builds up in the arteries that supply blood to the heart. This can then lead to a heart attack.

The good news is that heart disease is largely preventable. There are at least five key things you do to help prevent heart disease:

- 1- Don't smoke and if you do smoke, get help to quit. People who smoke are up to six times more likely to suffer a heart attack than nonsmokers.³ However, within one year of being smoke free, your risk for heart disease drops significantly.⁴ The Health Department offers free smoking cessation classes. Call 301-600-3289 for more information.
- 2- Take up some form of physical activity. It's very important to choose an activity that you enjoy and to aim for at least 30 minutes, 5 or more days a week. People who are inactive, even if they have no other risk factors, are nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease as those who are active.³
- 3- Eat a heart healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fiber, and low in saturated and trans fats. Fruits and vegetables have also been shown to help prevent cancers and many other diseases.
- 4- Maintain a healthy weight. Knowing your body mass index and waist circumference are two useful tools for assessing your risk. Lowering your weight by just 10 percent can be beneficial.⁴
- 5- Get health checks. Healthy adults should have their blood pressure checked at least every 2 years and their cholesterol measured at least once every 5 years. These screenings are critical as there are often no symptoms or "warning signs" to indicate that a problem might be present.

For more information to help you assess your risk for heart disease and carry out these tips, visit our ["Health Information and Resources"](#) page.

References:

¹Maryland Vital Statistics Annual Report, 2004,
www.vsa.state.md.us/vsa/doc/04annual.pdf

²Strategies for a Heart-Healthy and Stroke-Free America, 2006,
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/aag/pdf/aag_cvh2006.pdf

³Your Guide to Physical Activity and Your Heart, June 2006,
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/phy_active.pdf

⁴Heart disease prevention: 5 strategies keep your heart healthy, 2007,
www.mayoclinic.com/health/heart-disease-prevention/WO00041